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Cover Page : Idol of Sri Ramanuja at Sriperumbudur

ACARYA- HRIDAYAM AND ITS EXPOSITION OF THE DRAVIDA - VEDA

By. Dr. J. Parthasarathi

The Prapanna -Kula And its Veda

Among Indian religions Sri Vaisnavism stands unique for liberalising revolution it initiated and developed the elevation of the song utterances of a Tamil seer Nammalvar to the status of a Dravida veda as much authoritative as the Sanskrit Veda and the recognition of a full system of Vedic texts in Tamil as counterparts of the Sanskrit ones -four vedas, six vedangas, Vedanta sutras and Bhasyas. Nammalvar became the originator of a super society of **bhaktas** dedicated to Visnu called the **prapanna -kula**. This **Prapanna** community, is dedicated to the service(**kainkarya**) of the Lord resident in **Area** (images) of temples of the faith and its primary scripture is of the **Tiruvaymollo** of Nammalvar which celebrates in its poetic strains of ecstatic praise and self- surrender (**saranagati** or **prapatti**) the consecrated **arca** forms of Lord Visnu resident in our temples; it is considered the re-incarnation of the original veda itself suited to the adoration of the easily accessible forms taken by the Lord in temples.

The historical, sociological, linguistic- literary, religious- philosophical- cultural aspects of the institution of the **Dravida Veda**, its commentaries and the emergence of the **prapanna** community have been indicated by the present writer in an earlier article in this magazine. Five extant commentaries (culminating in the encyclopaedic **Itu** of 36000 granthas) of unparalleled erudition on Sanskrit and Tamil collectively called **Bhagavad visayam** provide us unending enjoyment, considered traditionally as God- enjoyment (**Bhagavad anubhava**) itself, of the kaleidoscopic visions, longings and musings of Nammalvar embodied in his immortal master- piece, elucidating them every now and then with citations not only from Tamil sources but also for veda itihasa- purana- pancaratra and other texts of the sanskrit tradition. Besides these

****The Dravida Veda-Vedanga; A revolutionary Cultural Cross-Current"- Sri Ramunuja Varil, April, 1981 pp 47-68**

we have separate treatises explaining doctrinal points and elaborating topics of independent interest in the faith. To this latter group belongs the *Acarya Hridayam*, a classic usually learnt by the traditional *kalaksepam* method and committed to memory as well

MAIN POINTS MADE IN ACARYAHRIDAYAM - This work expounds its inimitable prose-paragraphs called *cumikas* the nature of the *prapanna* who practices absolute surrender to Lord Narayana, ever contemplating His *Tirumantiram* and *Dvyam* mantras and ever engaged in service (*kainkarya*) to Him in His abodes of worship; it speaks of the *prapannas veda*, - the thousand and odd verses of the *Tiruvaymozhi*, the most authentic testimony of experienced vedic truths revealed to the seer Nammalvar in the medium of Tamil. It forcefully sets forth the irrelevance of language rank, learning and caste for assessing the greatness of divinity blessed *bhaktas* like Nammalvar citing examples of lovely devotees closest to Lord Visnu being honored and followed by persons of high birth and rank in worldly estimation.

RIPENING OF GOD-LOVE - Our eyes get moistened with tears as the Acarya Hridayam speaks in moving language of the Alvar's speech as the brimming overflow of his heart full with God-love, breaking its bounds with the ardors and intensities of his emotional experiences. These experiences are expressed by the Alvar directly in the first person and indirectly as well, in terms of the utterances of a damsel-in-love, her mother and her playmate according to well-reorganized conventions followed in Tamil *akam* (love) poetry. The Alvar's poetic strains are full of his loving attachment and intense yearning for *Tirumal* (repeated in many verses) and his intermittent inward experience of the presence of the supreme within his being" this long enduring stage of surpassing experience of God love (*para-bhakti*), leads on, as the fruit of its maturity, to the blessed vision of liberation in Tirumal's world of *Valkuntha* (*parajana*). The vision is followed by a final out burst of overwhelming realization with which the

Continued from page 40 of vol. 18 3&4 July 1995.

Alvar cries out, as the Lord takes him into His fold, and gives him bliss, eternal and unspeakable (*paramabhakti*).

The spontaneous choice of Tirumal -- The Alvar's dedicated love of Tirumal, resulting in his attaining Him is not the result of any effort on his part but the outcome of the choice favour showered on him by the Lord whose looks of redeeming grace fell on him even at birth; it was Tirumal who bestowed on him decisive and clear knowledge of the ultimate things of life and incomparable unceasing love for Him, choosing him as His instrument for, the redemption of mankind. Tirumal's grace sought him and governed him without his volition.. As he sings the praises of Tirumal and sets out his own experiences of Him in strains of emotional fervour the Alvar pauses to convey to worldly men his teachings on the adoration of the Lord ever ready to grant them His favours for the asking, the transitoriness of earthly existence and the injustices ruling in the world which drive one to the refuge of His feet. The Alvar rising like the Sun, gladdened the hearts of men seeking spiritual light and dried up the ocean of transmigratory existence by his example and teachings an achievement which even Rama and Krishna, Tirumal's incarnations with the Sun's radiance not accomplish.

The spectrum of melting devotional pursuits of the Alvars is viewed in several *currikais* of the Acarya Hridayam against that of comparable figures in our tradition like Prahlada, Arjuna, Hanuman, Vibhisana, Dasaratha, Yasoda, Sita, Andal, and the *Nitya-suris* attending on the Lord. The excelling greatness of *Tiruvaymozhi* as a work teaching and exemplifying the way of liberation by the purest God-love maturing into a total offering of oneself in surrender to Him, is highlighted by setting it against the *Bhagavadgita* which teaches the way to liberation staining it with an earthly involvement in fighting a war.

THE SEQUENTIAL FRAMEWORK OF TIRUVAYMOZHI - Nammalvar's flights of song in his epic masterpiece of *Tiruvaymozhi* of 1102 verses divided into ten decades arise out of the compulsions of his vision of the reality which had favoured him early in life with

clear perception, urging him to seek it in all its states - *Para*, *vyuha*, *vibhava*, *antaryami* and *archa*; the poems are not strung on a sequential framework and are knit together only way the association of loving emotions welling up in the author's heart as he goes on singing of a thousand things in His praise. The Acarya Hridayam makes good this apparent lack of sequential linking of the lyrical outpourings of the work; It works out an ordered sequence, inferable from the verses -- a sort of map of the divinely glowing empire of feelings ruled by Nammalvar. We are taken on a journey through this empire of melting hopes and fears ecstatic responses to the Lord dwelling in scenic spots of pure holiness, high souled praises, preachings and reflections, declarations of faith and flashes of vision culminating in final attainment of the Lord's own bosom. Nammalvar's poems are orchestrated with 'mighty mouthed' poetic rhymes rising to the heights of symphonies of unutterable sweetness with verbal linkages of *etukai* and *antati* enhancing their harmonies during oral chanting in the manner of the Sanskrit veda; Tiruvaimozhi is easily recognizable as a timeless poetic masterpieces, unparalleled among the world's religious classics.

Acharyahridayam literally means 'the heart of the preceptor' and it beautifully suggests the meaning: 'Our Preceptor Nammalvar's heart felt message to mankind (arising out of his life of matchless God-love and poetry born therefrom)'. This work in *manipravala* style by Azhahiyamanavalpperumal nayanaar (13th century A.D.) is a gem of purest ray serene' not only in its coverage of the mystical experiential content of Tiruvaimozhi but also in its manner of expression in cumikais in Tamil prose extuned heavily with citations from the poems of Nammalvar and other alvars and a few well known *upanisads* of the Dravida veda are themselves skilfully and felicitously used to expound various aspects and views on it. The treatise thus provides a feast of soul with a permanent enjoyment of words of power and beauty, like precious pearls and strung together by an expert craftsman. (As Manavala-mamunigal points out in his superb commentary to this work)

THE VEDIC SACRIFICE AND SOCIAL WELFARE

BY T.G. ARAVAMUTHAN, M.A., B.L.

Hindu social organisation and the principles underlying it are as sorely misunderstood by unreflecting Hindus as by foreigners: the former have now little in common with the ideals which impelled their ancient forbears, and the latter cannot see how a way of life other than their own could be rational or worth living. The idea of social service as a technique of social relations is of recent origin in the West. It is a device for rubbing out the sharp angularities of class distinctions, or for facilitating political infiltration among peoples a great way off. But large numbers of Hindus accept it as among the revelations of a golden age, the light of which they see journeying from the West to the East.

Ancient Hindu society was divided into grades by graded disciplines. A fourfold division of society, the aggregate of householders, — three groups, each with certain disciplines cast in a ritual mould (symbolising the embedded idea), and one group, with virtually the same discipline lay on the Brahmana householder. He was assigned no means of livelihood except what was given to him voluntarily by those who went to him to learn the way of higher life; he was enjoined not to lay even foodgrain for longer than the needs of three days and to keep on making offerings in the domestic fire thrice a day, of substances which exhausted virtually all that he could have had by way of income. The discipline of a lesser degree of severity lay on the Kshatriya in the gradations of his groups, high or low. He had to take upon himself the burden of protecting society from anti social elements, both internal and external, and of relieving social distress, receiving a small fee therefor. The higher Kshatriya baron of chieftain, and now and again to deplete such wealth as was accumulating with him in periodical offerings in fire, the chief offering being the Soma which was so scarce and difficult to procure that it could not be obtained except at preposterously high price. The highest Kshatriya, king or emperor, had to perform the great *Aśvamedha* sacrifice - a sacrifice in fire - once every four years, which drained him of what he could have put by in the inter-

vening years; or he had to conclude the *Rajasuya* sacrifice (another sacrifice in fire) with divesting himself of every vestige of property. Less severe was the impact of the discipline on the *Vaisya*, who, with his wealth of land, of cattle and of trade, had, for daily duty, the obligations of unstinted charity, and for periodical duties, the obligation of performing sacrifices in fire which kept depleting him of accumulations of wealth. These three—the 'twice-born'—disciplined thus in desirelessness, to the accompaniment of symbolic rituals, were enabled to enter on and persist in the discipline through the exertions of the 'once born' *Sudras*, who laboured for the production of 'consumer' goods and in the rendering of personal services, —a course of life which meant that the 'once born' had to sacrifice themselves so that the 'twice born' may immediately take over the fruits of their labours and offer those fruits in sacrifice, virtually in fire and in charity to the destitute. The vendor of *Soma* was subjected to great contumely for preferring to make a fortune by the sale of the *Soma* to offering it in sacrifice.

The prime principle of life of the Vedic People, in all their four orders, turns out thus to be ruthless extinguishment of desires, made practicable by a complete sacrifice of all possessions.

The severe discouragement of desires in general, and of acquisition and of retention of property in particular, prevented society stratifying itself into classes marked off by gradations in wealth or into groups divided by varieties in desires. Man did not stand divided from man by barriers to mutual goodwill and love. The better nature of man had full play and man found joy in giving himself to brother man in unstinted labour and love.

The most striking feature of the sacrifice of the 'twice-born' is that it was in fire. The objects were offered in fire so that they were completely consumed. The offering in fire is the most efficient mode of making the offering an irrevocable one: what is offered in *pūja* might come back in part at least to the offerer. What is offered in fire does not survive: the flames render the offering irretrievable.

Vedic culture has demanded, thus, of every one in every station of life, master or serf, that he shall keep himself free from attachments and from desire, leading a life in which he shall have as little of property and possessions as is possible in a world of temptations to wants and desires. Every one had to keep on divesting himself of everything in the nature of property as soon as it threatened to accumulate in his hands. The divestiture would not be final if the thing offered could come back to

following on physical death. The *Sanyasi* continues to live, not because of a desire to live but because the clock has not yet ticked off all the seconds of his life time.

The logic of the theory could not be escaped by even the gods who according to Rg-Vedic thought, are creatures of desires. The gods too have to submit themselves to the rule of renunciation. They too have to sacrifice. They generate sacrifice, they sit contemplating the place of sacrifice. They have indeed to sacrifice with satisfaction. The gods make one or other of themselves the offering and immolate themselves in fire (following the principle of the code of *Sanyasa* adopted by man for himself). If *Purusha*, because of the absolute-ness of his power, is not to turn into a baleful being, but is to function beneficially, he has to extinguish in himself the very desire to continue and to function : he has to get himself dismembered. Animals could not, therefore be exempt from the logic of the theory of the burnt offering. Animals may not be spared from destruction, if it is needed for renunciation of property and for nullification of desire, - so long as the could be desired and owned. The offering of animals in the sacrificial fire is, therefore, an inevitable corollary to the Vedic sacrificer's ethical code of offering up irretrievably his possessions of every kind. He took it that the sacrificing of the animals - the inflicting of pain on them in the process of sacrificing - is of considerably less gravity than the retention of property. That sometimes the offerings were of large numbers of animals was due not to the sacrificer being heartless, but to his cattle wealth being large.

The taking of animal life was much against the inclinations of the Rg-Vedic sacrificer. The strangling of the animal - there was no slitting of the throat - and the quartering of it were not for the taste of flesh, only a tiny part of the victim being tasted as symbolic of communion with the deity to whom the offering was made. Neither the patron of the sacrifice nor the priest, coming near the victim when it had been cut and carved, crammed himself with the flesh nor smacked lips with relish of juiciness of the morsels. The Rg-Vedic animal sacrifice, far from being a product of blood lust, was a ritual regrettable necessitated by the imperative ethical urge to the denuding oneself irrevocably of all possessions, irrespective

(Continued on page 35)

the sacrificer on the conclusion of the ritual as they would, at least in part, on the performance of *puja*. Nor would it be to the sacrificer's purpose if he offered the things up to a brother man: he could not saddle that other with property, the mainspring of desire, when he was divesting himself of ethical encumbrances for ethical deliverance. Only an offering in fire which wholly consumes what is thrown into it and leaves nothing behind for being salvaged is a true offering. The sacrifice in fire was, thus, inevitable as a ritual to whoso was prepared, day after day, to live a life of renunciation, readily destroying his possessions so that they could not be temptation either to himself or to his neighbours.

This discipline of life it is that is attested to by the *Rig-Veda* the earliest document testifying to the earliest known way of the Hindus. The innumerable prayers in it are for long life, offspring, wealth and power. But, the long life is for protracted service to the gods, the progeny is for that service being continued through the endless ages, and the wealth and the power are for incitements of efforts to overcome the temptations of possessions. When the sacrificers prayed, "May Dravinodas give us riches that may be heard of" they did not seek the riches for themselves; they declared, "We ask them for the gods." The sacrificers receive the riches and sacrifice them to the gods.

This cult of renunciation, formulated in the earliest days of Vedic culture when possessions were not spectacularly great, became the basis of complex sacrifices when material culture advanced and wealth increased. While only one or two goats formed the offering in the early days, great numbers of cattle of every description came to be offered in fire, in holocausts, with the increase in material possessions. Apparently, the temptations of economic prosperity loosened the grip of the cult of renunciation, and gradually, disposed the common man to feel exasperated at what appeared to him the wanton destruction of the valuable products of a Nature which, in India, was not only kind but also bountiful. Apparently, too, the paradox of taking life in the spirit of Ahimsa, to which we shall refer presently, was not being understood. Reactions such as these must have been responsible for emphasis being shifted to another technique of renunciation. Sri Krishna, claiming to be the very Vedas, declared that there is little need for the sacrificial ritual and the slaying of animal if man lives a life in which he has no desire for the fruits of his acts. This is renunciation-- sacrifice --in the spirit of Ahimsa

and there is no taking of life and no destruction of property which suffered to exist, is not permitted to rouse desire with its blandishments.

If the Buddha is to be treated as a protagonist of Ahimsa it will be only in virtue of his opposition to the taking of life in sacrifices, and notwithstanding that he allowed his followers and himself, the pleasures of the taste of flesh. If the founder of Jainism is to be included among the advocates of Ahimsa, it will be only in virtue of his caveat having extended to the extinguishment of life for any purpose, and notwithstanding that he approved of the surrender of human life by modes of suicide which involved protracted pain and suffering.

It is in the spirit of renunciation of the desires that, in later times, the great Harsha of Kanauj kept giving away, periodically, all that he had come by in the intervening periods, making gifts of them all to the deserving, at great convocations called Mokshas, or Maha-Moksha-Parishats. His was the spirit of the performer of the Rajasuya of old, though Buddhism it is that gets the credit for it in the pages of Yuan-Chwang and in the screeds of modern scholars in their ignorance of tradition. Sharp is the contrast between the spirit in which while Sri Krishna, deprecating desire, called on man to lead an active life, and that other in which the Buddha, condemning desire, called for a retreat from active life; but the difference means little to us to whom welfare spells compelling desires and mounting wants.

Thus the principle of Vedic sacrifices is the renunciation of every desire and the offering up of everything that could be desired, large or small paltry or precious, perishing or permanent. The abandonment of even the impulse to live was a logical sequence: love of one's own life is the worst of desires. To the logical necessity so reached, and to the emotional urge in the same direction by which it must have been accompanied, has to be attributed the vogue of *Sanyasa*,-- the formal adoption of a life of renunciation. For a stabilisation in its onerous code, there was not only an abandonment of wife, children and property, and all the desires and attachments from which they spring and to which they give rise, but even a surrender of the will to live, symbolised, even of entering into *Sanyasa*, by an anticipatory enactment of the ritual

SRI PADMANABHASWAMY TEMPLE

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Selvi M. S. Ramesh, I.A.S. (Retd.)

It is said that he used to perform his daily *pooja* to the *salagramas* which he had. While performing the *pooja* he used to meditate on *Mahavisnu*. During the meditation he used to find that a young child would interrupt him every day by displacing the *salagramas* and flowers and annoying him. But when the *Swamiyar* opened his eyes the child would disappear. One day he felt that the child had crossed the limits of tolerance and in a fit of anger he hit the child with his hand. The child got annoyed and informed the *Swamiyar* that he was none other than the deity he was worshipping and as he had hit him, he was going away to *Ananthankadu* and that if he wished to see him he could come there. The swami opened his eyes and felt very dejected and distressed. He ran in the direction in which he saw the child run. Tantalizingly he could hear the jingling sound of the child's waist and ankle ornaments. He felt he also saw little footprints of the child on the loose sand. Yet he could never catch up. Unmindful of hunger or thirst the *Bilvamangala* swami went on following the direction from where the jingling noise of the anklets were heard. One day he reached a spot where he heard the cry of a child. He saw a *pulaya* woman threatening her weeping child with the words that if it continued to weep she would throw the child out into the *Ananthankadu*. The moment the words *Ananthankadu* was uttered by the *Pulaya* woman the swamiji perked up his ears and his joy knew no bounds. He asked the lady where that *Ananthankadu* was. The *pulaya* woman showed him the direction to the *Ananthankadu* where upon the *swamiyar* proceeded a few paces and lo and behold the

sound of the waistband bells were heard again. Suddenly a huge *Iluppa* (*bassialongi folia*) tree came down with a loud thud. The swami saw that *Visnu* lying on His *Adishesha* with all His four arms in a grand endearing pose. The idol however was so long that it extended from Thiruvallar to Thiruppapur with only the middle portion at Thiruvananthapuram. The swamiyar fell at the feet of the Lord and sought to be forgiven. The Lord blessed him! The swamiyar then asked the deity to contract himself into a smaller form so that he could offer his worship and stay in the same place. The deity shrank in fulfillment of the desire of the devotee. The Bilvamangala swami offered worship to the deity and did *pradakshina* to the smaller idol. It is said that the *Iluppa* tree which fell indicating the spot where the Lord was resting was carved out into the image of Lord Mahavishnu in repose. This was the idol which was worshipped for a long time until it was replaced by the present idol made out of salagramas. It is also said that the Bilva Mangala swamiyar offered *neivedya* of rice *kanji* along with salted mango pieces to the deity in a coconut shell during the morning pooja. These were articles readily available in the forest area. Even today, the *neivedyam* offered to the Perumal in the morning consists of sweet rice porridge along with salted mango pieces in a coconut bowl. But the bowl is today encased in a gold covering. The pulaya woman was believed to have been helping the swamiyar with husking the paddy with her own hands for being offered by the swamiyar as *neivedyam* to the deity. In recognition of the yeoman service rendered by her, the Maharaja of Travancore is believed to have offered her a patch of paddy field so that she and her family could live comfortably. This field is called *Puthari Kantam* and lies in front of the eastern fort gate at Trivandrum. As the Bilva Mangala swamiyar believed to be a Nambudiri brahmin was the first person to have discovered the deity at Trivandrum even today the Nambudiri sanyasins are given preferential right to perform the *poojas* to Lord Padmanabhaswamy besides the *Pottis* (*poojaaris*)

appointed specially for the purpose by the king.

A slight variation of this story says that Bilvamangala swami himself hailed from Dakshina Karnataka region. There is a lake temple at Ananthapuram 34 kilometers south of Mangalore. The deity there is also Anantha Padmanabha and He is seen in a sitting posture on Adishesha. The peculiarity is that this temple is built in a lake. The bottom portion of the temple is built on Adishesha. The peculiarity is that this temple is submerged in water. There is a foot bridge connecting the main *gopura* with the sanctum sanctora. There is a cave on the northeast corner of the lake. It is believed that it was at this place, Bilvamangala swami was praying when the Lord appeared as a child. It was from here that the child disappeared when reprimanded by Bilvamangala swamy. It ran thro' that cave and the swamy also followed thro' that cave. The cave is believed to be about 7 kilometers long and then comes out near the sea coast. Later the swamy walked along the seacoast till he reached Ananthakadu and present Trivandrum. This is how the advocates of this slightly elaborated *sthalapuran* explain the presence of Tulu brahmin priests at Anantha Padmanabhaswamy temple to Bilvamangal swami hailing from Karnataka.

The second story connected with the origin of the temple is found in *Ananthasayana Mahatmyam*. Some old palm-leaf records also contain this legend. As per this record this temple was established by a Tulu brahmin hermit by name Diwakar Muni on the 950th day of *Kaliyuga*. It is said that Diwakar Muni was doing penance in *Aathartha Desa*. One day Lord Vishnu appeared before him in the form of a beautiful child. The sanyasi was taken up with the charms of the beautiful child and requested him to stay with him. The child agreed but laid down the condition that the sage should never get upset with his behavior and not lose his temper whatever be the provocation offered by the child. The hermit agreed. One day when the muni was in medita-

tion the child took the salagramas being worshipped by this sage and put it into his mouth. The muni felt that this was an unforgivable desecration and so got angry with the child. The child then reminded the saint about his promise and as he had lost his temper he said he would leave. He however added that if the saint so wished he could see him again in Ananthakadu, i.e. the forest of *Ananthan*. The sage was very sad. He left the place where he was sitting and started searching for the Ananthakadu. He reached a wooded area near the sea coast and he felt that he saw the particular form of the child which was with him and vanishing into a huge Iluppa tree. He went running to the Iluppa tree. The tree fell down and he saw the shape of Mahavisnu in *sayana* pose. The divine form was nearly 13 kilometers in length with the head in Thiruvallar, a place about five kilometers from the present fort. The feet of the deity was at Thiruppapur (eight kilometers in the opposite direction). The sanyasi was really mesmerized by the majesty of the Divine form and he pleaded with the Lord to assume a smaller form which could match his limited field of vision. It is said that the Perumal obliged the devotee and that is the form of Lord Padmanabhaswamy in the present temple at Thiruvananthapuram.

It will be noticed that the two *stahlapuranas* are almost identical with the exception that one refers to Bilva Mangala swami and the other refers to Diwakar Muni; but for the difference in the name of the sages, rest of the facts correlate. To substantiate the theory that it was Diwakar muni, the Tulu brahmin hermit who discovered this temple, even today nearly half the poojaris at the Padmanabhaswamy temple are from Tulu area in Karnataka. Bilva Mangala swami was a great Krishna Bhakta. He authored the great book *Krishna Karnamrutam*. The swamiyar Madam at Trivandrum is believed to be built over his *samadhi*.

A third legend connected with this temple mentions one other episode. It is said that in Ananthakadu where the

present temple stands there lived a pulaya couple. They were engaged in agricultural operations. One day the wife heard the cry of a baby and when she turned her head she saw a beautiful charming little child with a divine aura on its face. The cry of the child aroused her maternal instincts and she is said to have nursed the baby and left the contented babe under the shade of a tree and returned to her workspot. When she turned her head she was horrified to see a huge five-headed serpent spreading its hood and sheltering the child from the blazing heat in the forest. This miracle was noticed many days. This news of the unusual phenomenon spread across the land till it reached the ears of the king of Travancore. He immediately visited the spot and ordered a temple to be built at the spot as he recognized Mahavisnu and Adisesha in the child and serpent.

As stated earlier, it was Marthanda Varma, the maharaja of Travancore who did a lot for this temple. It was he who reconstructed the wooden sanctum sanctorum and who replaced the old wooden idol of the Lord with a new one made out of salagramas. And as a mark of total unconditional surrender to the Lord, it was this king who, in January 1750 (925 Malayala Era) came to the temple and surrendered the state, and all he had as a king to the Lord Sri Padmanabhaswamy at the sanctum sanctorum and proclaimed that henceforth he and his line will be known as Padmanabha dasas. He also made the conch as the emblem of the State. Thus arose the close association of Maharajas of Travancore with the temple, when Marthanda Varma proclaimed for the whole world to see that surrender to God, absolute surrender of all, will ensure absolute protection by the Supreme i.e. philosophy of *saranagathy*.

The administration of this temple in the early days vested in a council of Ooralars, known as "*Ettra Yogam*" had complete control over the administration of the temple. But later on with the rulers of Travancore taking more interest and especially from the reign of Marthanda Varma, the

powers of Oiralar in the management of the temple diminished and the role of the Maharaja increased.

A day in the temple runs along with clockwork like precision, beginning at 4 a.m. Between 8.00 and 9.00 a.m. Even today members of the royal family visit the temple everyday. In the evening there are two poojas known as *Attazha* pooja and *Arthajama* pooja. The former is just a little after the evening *deeparadhana* which is one of the most important pooja timings in this temple. At that time, the image is beautifully decorated with sandal, flowers, silk clothes and the inner shrine is brilliantly lighted. The daily run of poojas closes at about 10.00 p.m. Mr. Nagam Aiya details the worship offered on any one day at this temple and concludes by saying that this temple "is a centre of attraction to the young and old by its perfect system of worship, by the sweet fragrance and peace it permeates, the health and recreation it offers, its remarkable neatness, its marvellous punctuality and regularity in all its varied functions, the divine beneficence which it dispenses and above all by the devotion, the reverence and the order which silently inculcates on the thousands of volaries that visit it". Even today for many of the local residents the half an hour and more spent in circumambulating the temple is a spiritually ennobling experience.

SCULPTURE

This temple has a wealth of excellent sculptured pieces. Even here, Sri Nagam Aiya in his book "The Travancore State Manual" has really done yeoman service in elucidating and recording for readers in great detail the marvels of sculptured items found in the precincts of this temple. Earlier in this chapter, already mention has been made of the figures of ladies with lamps carved out of the stone in the Seevali mantapa. The "Aayarkkal mantapa" which is also known as Kulasekhara mantapa is also full of excellent specimens of carvings in stone, which an author refers to

as "ageless exquisite pieces of sculptural rhetoric". It is said that the Maharaja of Travancore brought talented artisans from all parts of India, personally supervised their work to ensure a very high quality of artistic pieces inside the temple. In this context, there is an interesting story (however not corroborated with any recorded evidence) which is popularly repeated. It says that once an artisan who was working on a delicate figure was concentrating on his delicate work so much that without turning his head called out to his assistant to handover to him betelnut for chewing! Unfortunately, the assistant was not present at that time, but the Maharaja who was passing by did not want the concentration to the artisan to be distracted by having to call for the assistant again. So without any hesitation, he is believed to have handed over the chew to the artisan. Such was the Maharaja's enthusiasm and concern for filling the temple with excellent sculpture work. The sculptor knew from the manner in which the chew was handed over to him that it was not his usual assistant! When he turned his head and found to his dismay that it was the Maharaja who had acted the part of his servant, he felt so frightened and humbled. He attempted to cutoff his own finger as he felt that the finger had offended the royalty. Of course the king prevented such an extreme proof of loyalty. The story even if not true, illustrates the fact that the Maharajas of Travancore have taken and continue to take a personal interest in the affairs of the temple. To quote Mr. Nagam Aiya again, the excellent specimens of stone work displayed in the Kulasekhara mantap prove "that the obdurate granite has been made to bend and mould in obedience to the artist's chisel in very remarkable and Unlikely ways". He continues and says that some of the pillars "are so richly and delicately carved that words fail to express the delight and admiration which every visitor feels".

What is more as illustration of the cosmopolitan outlook of healthy religious toleration in evidence among the Hindus of those days, one finds that though this temple is

dedicated to Lord Vishnu, the corridors in this temple have many sculptured figures of *Siva* and allied deities. At one place one can see the figure of Lord Mahavishnu portrayed as sitting on *Adisesa* with his five hoods held as a canopy over the God. The hoods are so delicately and realistically carved out that one cannot but notice the true to life delicate lines with black marks in the hoods. Close to that idol are portrayed *Garuda* and *Hanuman* standing on reverential pose. Not very far away is the carved image of *Vignesvara* in a sitting posture with His unmistakable portly belly. The artisans have made *Ganesa's* figure so realistic that they even depict three Potti brahmins performing pooja to Him! One has *nelvedyam* in his hand. To quote Mr. Nagama Aiyar again "the solid figure of potti brahmin performing pooja in a sitting posture, an image a foot and a half in height seems to be a most magnificent piece of artistic work." The Picture of *Siva* with the deer in His hand with the Moon and the *Ganges* in the form of a woman very clearly displayed on the *jata* or the plaited hair shown as a knot on the crown, all these are only illustrative of the excellent manner in which even delicate details are eloquently depicted-veritable sermons on stone! Scenes from *Ramayana* and *Bhagavata* in connected manner are depicted on pillars and the verandahs of Kulasekhara mandapa. To quote Sri Nagam Aiyar again, the verandah beam with the first scene in *Ramayana*, viz. the *Putrakameshti yagam*, and going on to entrusting of Rama, Lakshmana by Dasaratha to Visvamitra, the killing of Tataka in the forests, the Ahalya *sapavimochana* scene, the departure of Sri Rama, Lakshmana and Sita for the forests, the crossing of the river Bhagirathi on a boat, the chariot that brought them from Ayodhya to the riverside standing on the banks of the river, the interview of Rama with the hermits of the forests, the joy visible on their faces, the stealing of Sita by Ravana the fighting between Rama and the Rakshasas, the friendship of Sugriva, Hanuman and Sri Rama, the death of Vali, the rough sea with its huge waves

and Hanuman crossing it to Lanka and later his setting fire to the city of Lanka, with beautiful discernible depictions smoke arising from the fire are all presented in sequential breathtaking beautiful manner. The beams also contain scenes from *Bhagavatam* again represented in a connected manner. Trees, bushes, parrots, squirrels, monkeys, elephants, etc. are all carved in a lifelike and artistic manner. Nagam Aiya says "such a magnificent work of art cannot but excite wonder and admiration in the minds of the aesthetic among the connoisseurs of the west or the east. Broadly stated, in these sculptured figures are correctly represented the elements embodied and passions personified. Some are figures represented as grasping sceptres and shields, symbols of justice and ensigns of religion or weapons of war and trophies of peace. Some of them have aspects that inspire terror while others are distinguished by placid serenity and benignity of countenance and some others again betray evident marks of dejection and inward anguish".

As it is not possible in the constraint of this small chapter to quote more elaborately from the poetic prose of Sri Nagam Aiya, I would sincerely and seriously suggest that those who are interested in studying about the wealth of sculptural reliefs found in this temple along with temple rituals and practices of this temple, may please refer to the highly readable, engrossing and interesting Manual produced by Sri Nagam Aiya in three volumes on Travancore state. Usually state manuals of post independence vintage will be dry as dust chronicles but this is an exception as it is evidently the work of a great committed gifted writer. Needless to say similar pieces of beautiful carvings are available in many of the equally famous temples in the south, especially the temple of Lord Srinivasa at Tirupati or of Lord Ranganatha at Srirangam. The mere fact that other temples have equally brilliant sculptured pieces in no way reduces the beauty and life that has been blown into these pieces of stone by the highly skilled artisan of Kerala.

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Besides these two festivals, one other important event celebrated in this temple is the Bhadra deepam, in the month of Mithuna (July) and Kanya (January). This festival lasts for seven days. The other great festival celebrated once in six years is the *Murajapam*. The *Murajapam* is a fantastic ceremony. The first *Murajapam*, was celebrated in 925 M.E. (1749-1750) by Maharaja Marhanda Varma. It is said that he started this massive ceremony lasting for 56 days to expiate for the sins of having taken the lives of so many people during the innumerable wars of conquest that he undertook while expanding his small Venad territory to bigger Trivandrum State. In order to reestablish peace, prosperity and happiness in his kingdom through divine grace,

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It is of interest to quote here what Prof. Max Muller and Prof. Ninian Smart have said of Ramanuja. Max Muller has observed: "I have generally followed the guidance of Sankara, as he seems to carry the *Vedanta* doctrine to the highest point; but I feel bound to say that Ramanuja is on many points the more faithful interpreter of *Vedantasutras* ... He claims for his interpretation the authority of philosophers more ancient than Sankara and of course the authority of the *Vedantasutras* themselves in properly understood." And Prof. Ninian Smart remarks: "Ramanuja is the greatest exponent of Hindu Theism and the greatest philosopher of *Bhakti*... The analogy of self-body relationship between God and the cosmos is a good way, perchance the best way, of explaining both the transcendence and the immanence of God... Ramanuja is very strong on the dependence of the cosmos on the Lord. For me, Ramanuja's doctrine is the heart of Vedanta and a clear expression of the real concerns of the *Brahma-sutras*."

It is not without reason that such categorical observations are made by these eminent scholars. According to Ramanuja, no Vedic text can be considered have a greater validity than another. (Sankara has presumed greater validity for the *abheda* texts than the *bheda* texts) Apparent contradictions in the texts have to be reconciled and harmonized, by a true explanation of the meaning of such texts. Ramanuja has attempted this with the help of another Vedic texts themselves and achieved a large degree of success and the result is the *Visistadvaita* philosophy and the *sarira-sariri* relationship between the universe and God.

Ramanuja made bhakti the sole means of worship of the Supreme God. By making bhakti the pivot of religion he made it possible for religion to be popularized. God became accessible

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even to the meanest, without any long laborious process of discipline, provided he was a true *bhakta*. Making *bhakti* the pivot of popular religion was one of the most important points in the life work of Sri Ramanuja.

Bhakti, according to him, was the truest and the most unfailing means for the attainment of salvation (*moksha*). He declared *bhakti* to be the most suitable means to achieve purity, sinlessness and selflessness in life. The emotion of *bhakti* is said to be a feeling akin to love; it is indeed deep devotion and love. It is a man's loving devotion to God. If he is made the object of all our attachment, then everything else ceases in time to have the power of attracting our love; it is indeed deep devotion and love. It is man's loving devotion to God. If He is made the object of all our attachment, then everything else ceases in time to have the power of attracting our love; through intense attachment to that Divine Being, there will arise in us absolute non-attachment else ceases in time to have the power of attracting our love; through intense attachment to that Divine Being, there will arise in us absolute non-attachment to ourselves Ramanuja's gospel of divine love which gave a wide scope for the uplift of the lower classes is of great value in social history of India.

Ramanuja's religion has been called Srivaishnavism, because Sri, the goddess Lakshmi, is made to have an important function. The concept of Lakshmi as the Divine consort of Vishnu is an ancient one in Hindu religion. *Prakriti*, which is the source material of the created universe, is obedient to the will of the *Paramatman* and gives birth to the universe in consequence of His association with it. Hence *prakriti* is looked upon as the wife of God and the mother of the universe. Lakshmi represents the power of *prakriti* in Srivaishnavism.

When many means of his *bhakti* endeavors to attain *moksha*, it is found that he often feels helpless and hopelessly forlorn on account of his knowledge of his own culpable unworthiness to be blessed with the salvation of soul-emancipation and God-attainment. As also on account of his very natural conception of God as a just and impartial apportioner of the fruits of *karma* to all His creatures We are led to face the problem of how the mercy of the

loving God may be reconciled with the strict impartiality of the absolutely just God. It is in a situation like this that we feel the need for the kindly interposition of a suitable intermediary between us and our great God, an intermediary who, on the one hand, is willing and able to excuse our faults and on the other hand, effectively approach Almighty God with the petition for mercy on behalf of His weak and erring creatures. Srivaishnavism looks upon Lakshmi as such an interceder. If all men happen to be His children and if Mother Lakshmi intercedes between weak and suffering mankind on the one hand and Almighty God on the other, we can understand how none can be kept out of the holy of the Holies and none can be looked upon as unworthy to receive the grace of God. Therefore, in this religion there is an all comprehensive, divine graciousness which knows no exclusion. The reciprocity and universality of divine and human love as thus taught has in no small measure been the result of the Mother and all being made to intercede between God and all His children so as to temper His severe justice with tender mercy. The popularization in India of the fatherhood of God, the Motherhood of Lakshmi and the Brotherhood of man is indeed in a notable degree due to Ramanuja and his work in life.

Srivaishnavism represents the confluence and amalgamation of various allied streams of thought and influences flowing from the Vedic Vishnu-Narayana worship, the Bhagavata movement, the epical Rama and Krishna stories, the Agamic vaishnava movement the Azhwar Vaisnava movement the Vaishnava mantra school, the Visishtadvaita vedanta School and so on, all running on parallel lines. Ramanuja synthesized all these earlier movements and consolidated them into a solid and strong philosophy and religion and gave to Srivaishnavism its present shape and organization and first rate foundation of Vedanta philosophy. He introduced the educated leadership of Hindu society to the double tradition of Sanskrit and Tamil *Srivaishnava* theism.: *Ubhaya* vedanta. He canonized the works in Tamil of the Azhwars as a second vedanta identical in meaning and import with the Sanskrit vedanta. He showed the prahbandas the 4000 hymns of praise but profound philosophical treatises akin to the *upanishads*. He was the originator of neo-vaishnavism which according to several eminent scholars

became the main supporter and protector of Hinduism during the ensuing Mohammedan onslaught. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, "Ramanuja, with a most practical philosophy, a great appeal to the emotions, entire denial of birth-rights before spiritual attainment and appeals through the popular tongue completely succeeded on bringing the masses back to Vedic religion."

Another important life-work of Ramanuja in theistic religion is the thoroughness with which he accomplished the difficult task of formulating and enforcing the details of daily worship in Sri Vaishnava temples. There is reason to believe that before his time the great Vishnu temples in the country were in a disorganized state and had ceased to attract spiritual seekers. Ramanuja set to himself the task of reforming temple worship and making the temples once more the spiritual centres, and he accomplished this task with the thoroughness that characterized all that he did. Specifically he wanted to eliminate the admixture of non-Sri Vaishnava rites in the temples. Ramanuja introduced new rules and new officers in the temple without permanently alienating the representatives of the previous regime. He, no doubt, did meet with resistance when he introduced the changes in Srirangam temple. Two cases are noted when Ramanuja was asked to replace a non-brahmin by a brahmin in the temple administration. In both the cases Ramanuja decided to retain the non-brahmin in the position. It is said that he had to live, away from, Srirangam for a while on account of the hostility of the temple officers and he returned only when the Srivaishnavas of Srirangam were willing to accept his reform in the worship at the temple. The code of worship which he had laid down over nine centuries ago is in force even today, and every Vishnu shrine resounds with the benediction, "May the divine commands of Sri Ramanuja ever increase in strength." (*Ramanujarya divyajnya vardhatam abhivardhatam*)

Ramanuja did not give a rigid finality to his work of consolidation of Srivaishnavism. If he had exhaustively defined all the dogmas, beliefs and customs and practices, there would have been no chance for his successors to develop

and Hanuman crossing it to Lanka and later his setting fire to the city of Lanka, with beautiful discernible depictions smoke arising from the fire are all presented in sequential breathtaking beautiful manner. The beams also contain scenes from *Bhagavatam* again represented in a connected manner. Trees, bushes, parrots, squirrels, monkeys, elephants, etc. are all carved in a lifelike and artistic manner. Nagam Aiya says " such a magnificent work of art cannot but excite wonder and admiration in the minds of the aesthetic among the connoisseurs of the west or the east. Broadly stated, in these sculptured figures are correctly represented the elements embodied and passions personified. Some are figures represented as grasping sceptres and shields, symbols of justice and ensigns of religion or weapons of war and trophies of peace. Some of them have aspects that inspire terror while others are distinguished by placid serenity and benignity of countenance and some others again betray evident marks of dejection and inward anguish".

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even to the meanest, without any long laborious process of discipline, provided he was a true *bhakta*. Making *bhakti* the pivot of popular religion was one of the most important points in the life work of Sri Ramanuja.

Bhakti, according to him, was the truest and the most unfailing means for the attainment of salvation (*moksha*). He declared *bhakti* to be the most suitable means to achieve purity, sinlessness and selflessness in life. The emotion of *bhakti* is said to be a feeling akin to love; it is indeed deep devotion and love. It is a man's loving devotion to God. If he is made the object of all our attachment, then everything else ceases in time to have the power of attracting our love; it is indeed deep devotion and love. It is man's loving devotion to God. If He is made the object of all our attachment, then everything else ceases in time to have the power of attracting our love; through intense attachment to that Divine Being, there will arise in us absolute non-attachment else ceases in time to have the power of attracting our love; through intense attachment to that Divine Being, there will arise in us absolute non-attachment to ourselves. Ramanuja's gospel of divine love which gave a wide scope for the uplift of the lower classes is of great value in social history of India.

Ramanuja's religion has been called Srivaishnavism, because Sri, the goddess Lakshmi, is made to have an important function. The concept of Lakshmi as the Divine consort of Vishnu is an ancient one in Hindu religion. *Prakriti*, which is the source material of the created universe, is obedient to the will of the *Paramatman* and gives birth to the universe in consequence of His association with it. Hence *prakriti* is looked upon as the wife of God and the mother of the universe. Lakshmi represents the power of *prakriti* in Srivaishnavism.

When many means of his *bhakti* endeavors to attain *moksha*, it is found that he often feels helpless and hopelessly forlorn on account of his knowledge of his own culpable unworthiness to be blessed with the salvation of soul-emancipation and God-attainment. As also on account of his very natural conception of God as a just and impartial apportioner of the fruits of *karma* to all His creatures. We are led to face the problem of how the mercy of the

loving God may be reconciled with the strict impartiality of the absolutely just God. It is in a situation like this that we feel the need for the kindly interposition of a suitable intermediary between us and our great God, an intermediary who, on the one hand, is willing and able to excuse our faults and on the other hand, effectively approach Almighty God with the petition for mercy on behalf of His weak and erring creatures. Srivaishnavism looks upon Lakshmi as such an interceder. If all men happen to be His children and if Mother Lakshmi intercedes between weak and suffering mankind on the one hand and Almighty God on the other, we can understand how none can be kept out of the holy of the Holies and none can be looked upon as unworthy to receive the grace of God. Therefore, in this religion there is an all comprehensive, divine graciousness which knows no exclusion. The reciprocity and universality of divine and human love as thus taught has in no small measure been the result of the Mother and all being made to intercede between God and all His children so as to temper His severe justice with tender mercy. The popularization in India of the fatherhood of God, the Motherhood of Lakshmi and the Brotherhood of man is indeed in a notable degree due to Ramanuja and his work in life.

Srivaishnavism represents the confluence and amalgamation of various allied streams of thought and influences flowing from the Vedic Vishnu-Narayana worship, the Bhagavata movement, the epical Rama and Krishna stories, the Agamic vaishnava movement the Azhwar Vaisnava movement the Vaishnava mantra school, the Visishtadvaita vedanta School and so on, all running on parallel lines. Ramanuja synthesized all these earlier movements and consolidated them into a solid and strong philosophy and religion and gave to Srivaishnavism its present shape and organization and first rate foundation of Vedanta philosophy. He introduced the educated leadership of Hindu society to the double tradition of Sanskrit and Tamil *Srivaishnava* theism. : *Ubhaya* vedanta. He canonized the works in Tamil of the Azhwars as a second vedanta identical in meaning and import with the Sanskrit vedanta. He showed the prahbandas the 4000 hymns of praise but profound philosophical treatises akin to the *upanishads*. He was the originator of neo-vaishnavism which according to several eminent scholars

became the main supporter and protector of Hinduism during the ensuing Mohammedan onslaught. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, "Ramanuja, with a most practical philosophy, a great appeal to the emotions, entire denial of birth-rights before spiritual attainment and appeals through the popular tongue completely succeeded on bringing the masses back to Vedic religion."

Another important life-work of Ramanuja in theistic religion is the thoroughness with which he accomplished the difficult task of formulating and enforcing the details of daily worship in Sri Vaishnava temples. There is reason to believe that before his time the great Vishnu temples in the country were in a disorganized state and had ceased to attract spiritual seekers. Ramanuja set to himself the task of reforming temple worship and making the temples once more the spiritual centres, and he accomplished this task with the thoroughness that characterized all that he did. Specifically he wanted to eliminate the admixture of non-Sri Vaishnava rites in the temples. Ramanuja introduced new rules and new officers in the temple without permanently alienating the representatives of the previous regime. He, no doubt, did meet with resistance when he introduced the changes in Srirangam temple. Two cases are noted when Ramanuja was asked to replace a non-brahmin by a brahmin in the temple administration. In both the cases Ramanuja decided to retain the non-brahmin in the position. It is said that he had to live away from Srirangam for a while on account of the hostility of the temple officers and he returned only when the Srivaishnavas of Srirangam were willing to accept his reform in the worship at the temple. The code of worship which he had laid down over nine centuries ago is in force even today, and every Vishnu shrine resounds with the benediction, "May the divine commands of Sri Ramanuja ever increase in strength." (*Ramanujarya divyajnya vardhatam abhivardhatam*)

Ramanuja did not give a rigid finality to his work of consolidation of Srivaishnavism. If he had exhaustively defined all the dogmas, beliefs and customs and practices, there would have been no chance for his successors to develop

differences of opinion and create schisma and parties within the fold. Ramanuja was strongly against any monopoly of spiritual knowledge. This was amply in evidence in his discipleship of Tiruckkosthiyur nambi (Goshtipurna) when, against the express command of his preceptor, Ramanuja taught a secret teaching to the common people. This brings out the comprehensive humanity and liberalism and rationalism of Ramanuja in the religious sphere. And also his concern, which was to fill the rest of his life, to spread the *darsana* which until then had been the carefully guarded property of a small group of devotees; to spread it both to the community of devotees at all vaishnava temple and to the all indian scholarly community of students of Sanskrit scriptures.

He did not also think in terms of sole successor to himself, even though he himself contrived to become the sole successor of the prevailing five schools of thought, each under a different *acharya*. He must have been convinced that a single successor was likely to lead in course of time in the hands of incompetent men to spiritual and also social and political tyranny. He therefore dispersed his authority among his chosen disciples who were all brilliant scholars and devotees of God.

Ramanuja was liberal and rational in the social and political spheres also. In the social sphere, he rebelled against casteism. This created a domestic crisis in his life and forced him to renounce *grihasthasrama* married state and take up *sannyasa*. He was not prepared to accept that *bahyachara* (external orthodoxy) and birth were all that counted in life. On the other hand he made people realize by his own conduct on several occasions that they did not count at all. For instance it is said that while proceeding to river Cauveri for taking his bath he would be led by an orthodox brahmin srivaishnava disciple, on his return after the bath, he would be led by one Dhanurdasa, a disciple belonging to a very low caste. His calling the lowest caste (the untouchables of those days) by appellation of *Tirukkulattar*, meaning the people of the holy of sacred caste foreshadows Mahatma Gandhi in the twentieth century calling the untouchables by the name of

Harijans or the people of God. And his according permission to untouchables to worship in the famous Narayana temple at Melkote is another act of great daring and courage testifying to his liberalism in religious and social spheres and also his preference of *Agama* doctrine of caste-equality before God to the *Smritis* in such matters. But he also insisted that karma as enjoined in the *sastras* should never be abandoned. It should continue even when one progressed in spiritual life. And karma according to visistadvaita, is not only rituals prescribed in the *Vedas*, but also prayer and devotional worship.

Ramanuja was against any political control or direction over religious matters. He perhaps felt there would be a tendency for kings to exercise religious power through priests and for priests and for priests to exercise political power through kings resulting in a theocratic oligarchy to the detriment of the people and other prevalent religions. He strongly advised his followers not to hanker for political power or patronage and live in towns and cities for that purpose. He advised them to combine into one harmonious life social duties, religious rites and higher realms of devotion and meditation and live in unified religious communities around temples.

The liberalism, rationalism and harmony which were not only preached by him but was so much in evidence all through the long span of life of the great acharya himself are little in evidence today among his followers and are in fact eclipsed by dogmatism, bigotry, factionalism and a strong lust for political patronage, wealth and power. Srivaishnava religious life has stagnated since the days past Manava Mamuni and become temple centered, being limited to idol worship, mechanical recitations of some hymns and passive listening to such recitations and to some stereotyped religious discourses without any interest in intellectual study, creative scholarship, spiritual practices spiritual experiences and pursuit of spiritual *sadhanas*.

It should be unceasing endeavor of the teachers and leaders of the community to day and of organizations like Sri Ramanauja Vedanta Centre to provoke and promote vigorous efforts to restore to Srivaishnavism its liberalism and progressiveness it has built around itself.

SRI STUTHI

L. Srinivasan

baddha diksasya - He binds himself to this task. There is no one else who can bind Him to anything. Without the consent of the wife, no sacrifice can be performed unless both are of the same mind, the husband alone has no right to perform the rite.

baddha diksasya has the effect of showing that Visnu has al-ready obtained Laksmi's consent for embarking on this venture.

Visnoh is used here, having in mind the text of *srivishnupurana*, *visnoh sriranapayini*, that *sri* ever remains inseparable from Visnu, in support of the second half of the sloka regarding *avatars*. Further, it is meant to indicate that Visnu, being an all pervader, is present, wherever there is any cry for help, to provide relief.

acakhyusstvam priya sahacarim - A householder is not entitled to perform acts of dharma without the participation of his betterhalf. The sacrifice of protecting *bhaktas* has also to be undertaken by god in same manner. *sahacari* means a helpmate in dharma. That shows Laksmi's *anurupya* or being worthy of Visnu. *priya* or sweetness reveals Her being to His liking or *abhimatatva*. *priya sahacarim* thus has the effect of the phrase *svabhimatanurupa* in *saranagatigadya* of Ramanuja.

We also put in mind of Janaka's words to Rama at the time of his wedding: "This Sita my daughter, is going to be your helpmate in discharging your sacred obligations. She is a pativrata (one wedded to her husband) who considers service to her husband as her religious duty, a lady with high and rare qualities, and she will stand by you in weal and woe alike, like your shadow." *sahacari* means who will act most harmoniously with her partner, walking in step with them.

Dharma is the accomplisher of other worldly *sreyas* or felicit

ity. The śruti says: *sa vu śreyān bhavati jāyamañah* - it is only by being born is *śreyas* for Him. The means for attaining that is dharma. In that he has taken *dikṣa* or vow, and in that vow Lakṣmi is *sahacārī*, helper and coworker. Hence in all His *avatāras* she is always with Him. In *yatirājasaptatiḥ* (2) also the ācārya says *sahadharma-carim saureḥ*.

aikamatyopapannam - This makes it clear that Her conduct will never be marred by difference of opinion with Him. Being a dear partner and of the same mind, She helps Him in the proper completion of His enterprise.

prādurbhāvaiḥ - For protecting his devotees, Viṣṇu resorts to many avatars like Rama, Krishna etc. Śrī *viṣṇupurāṇa* (1-9- 142-145) declares that when He was born as Rama, She took the form of Sita; when He became Krishna, She emerged as Rukmini. In fact, in all His avatars, she is inseparable from Him in His mission. She participates in the same task heartily as a co-worker. She has her full share in all the activities of Her Lord. Lakṣmi helping Him in dharma is manifest in avatars and hence reference to them by the poet.

duroḥṣiptairiva madhuratā dugdarasans tarangaiḥ - What has been said so far is now illustrated by means of a five simile. The waves of the Milky Ocean, in which Lakṣmi took an *avatara*, are flying far from its shores, but however far they may be thrown, the sweetness of milk constituting the waves continues in them. Likewise, Your Lord may take *avatara*s far from *Śrīvaikunṭa* but You ever remain with Him without parting.

The Ocean of milk is the permanent abode of Narayana in the material world. From there He assumes various avatars. The waves are but part of the ocean and avatars are similarly only manifestations of God. The Lord is likened to the Milky ocean, His avatars to its waves, and Lakṣmi to the sweetness of the milky waves and Lakṣmi to the sweetness of the milky waves. Viṣṇu is the milk and Lakṣmi is its sweetness. Waves are caused by the mighty winds in the ocean. Avatars are likewise occasioned by the strong compassion of God. Milk is important being the support of sweetness. Sweetness can not exist separately from milk, as brightness cannot remain apart from the Sun. But the whole value

of milk is due to its sweetness. If Laksmi does not take avataras along with Visnu, His incarnations would be without any relish, declares Kuranatha in *sristavah* (1). Our poet describes Her as the very essence of His embodiments. Sweetness is the very essence of milk and invariably accompanies it. The presence of Laksmi with Visnu is equally invariable. By Her association He becomes sweet. Otherwise He is liable to resort to punishment also.

Sloka 11

***dhatte sobham harimarakate tavaki murtiradya
tanvi tunga stanabharanata taptajambunadabha
yasyam gacchantyudayavilayair nityamanandasindhau
icchavegollasitalahari vibhramam vyaktayaste.***

"The complexion of Your Lord is green as emerald. Your slender-creeper-like body, bending with the weight of your raised breasts, has the tint of melted gold, with which You lend additional lustre to the natural brilliance of Visnu. Your original form is an ocean of bliss. As waves arise from the sea and get lost in the sea itself, your incarnations emanate from your primal form and merge in itself by Your own will. "

dhatte sobham harimarakate - This sloka is interpreted in two ways.

1) That a precious stone shines by itself is true, but only when it is set in gold is its beauty enhanced. Likewise, Visnu shines in His own glory, but His glory is enhanced by His association with Sri. A Precious stone is set in gold is its beauty enhanced. Likewise, Visnu shines in His own glory but His glory is enhanced by His association with Sri. A great precious stone set in gold, but gold is never set in a gem. But here Sri, representing gold, is set in the emerald form of Hari. She thus adds to His lustre, This is one view.

2). The second view is that Her lustre is much greater than that of Hari, and the fact is that the emerald of Hari resembles a

gem set in the gold of Sri. While Hari is likened to an emerald, Sri is said to possess the brilliance of molten gold. In the commentary on the upanisadic text *nilatoyada madhyastha* it has been explained that the lightning of Sri contains within it the blue form of Visnu. The same idea applies to the present context. Her form is small and is contained within that of the Lord, but Her brightness is grater engulfing and containing within it the blue form of visnu.

The lustre of Laksmi is like molten gold. She is slender like a creeper and Her form is slightly bent due to the weight of Her raised breasts. The form of visnu is complete only with Laksmi. Her form, though small, is sufficient, and necessary to enhance His handsomeness. The form of the Lord bristles with weapons used for punishing inspiring fear in our minds. It is the presence of Sri that renders His form pleasing to look at removing our fears. *tavaki murtiradya* - Narayana has five forms, viz *para*, *vyuha*, *vibhava*, *antaryami* and *archa*. The beginningless and eternal *para rupa* is the source of all His other forms. All His incarnations emanate from the *Para Vasudeva* form in *Paramapada* and finally merge in it. As waves in the sea itself, all the other forms of His arise in the *para rupa* due to the force of His *sankalpa*, actuated by deep compassion, and get lost in it. The same is the case with Laksmi. All the incarnations that She undertakes with Visnu arise in Her *para rupa* resting on the chest of *Para Vasudeva* in *Srivaikuntha*, due to the force of Her *sankalpa*, actuated by deep compassion, and get lost in it. Visnu is known as *anandasindhu* or Ocean of Bliss. Thus all *avatars* of Visnu or Laksmi are blissful. and they are caused by the free will of the divine couple and are never due to any *karma* as in the case of bound selves. She is the consort of the Lord of the Universe, having equal status and importance. However, Her will always follows that of Visnu and hence she takes *avatars* whenever He does.

The *para rupa* is the sea, *sankalpa* is the wind and he incarnations are the waves. The sea never dries up, and the *para rupa* of the blissful seas of the Visnu and Sri are also perennial.

The previous sloka gave the example of the Milky Ocean. The present one gibes the illustration of the ocean of Bliss, to

remove any possible misapprehension that the divine descents, taking place as they do in the material world, are due to *karma*. This is also made clear by stating that they are due purely to the *sankalpa* of Visnu and Sri respectively.

Sloka 12

***asamsarm vitatmkhillam vangamayam tad vibhutih
yadbhrubhangat kusumadhanusah kinkaro merudhanva
yasyam nityam nayamsatakaireka laksyo mahendrah
padme tasam parinatirasau bhavalesasu bhavalesaistvadiyaih***

"*Padma devi!* All branches of knowledge from the beginning of the world are the sole possession of Sarasvati, the consort of Brahma. Siva, who used Mount Meru as his bow, had to yield and become a servant of Cupid, whose bow uses only flowers as its arrows, because the latter too the help of Parvati, whose eyebrow was like another bow. Indra has all his thousand eyes fixed constantly on his spouse Indrani being lost in her beauty. The high positions of power and prestige that these divine ladies enjoy are the result of a mere fraction of Your grace."

In sloka 11 how all incarnations of Laksmi emanate from Her primal form out of Her own free will was dealt with. Here, how a mere fraction of Sri's grace is the cause of Saraswati, Parvati and Indrani enjoying their high status is explained.

asamsaram ... vibhutih - All the 64 branches of knowledge are considered to have their origin in the vedas. Brahma, the first being to be created by Visnu from His naval, was taught the vedas by Him, who is thus the first *acarya*. As Sarasvati is the consort of Brahma, who constantly holds her in his speech, she becomes the *vag devata* or deity presiding over speech and so all knowledge on her custody.

Yadbhrubhangat kusumadhanusah kinkaro merudhanva - Shiva prowess is well-known as the user of Mount Mahameru and his mighty bow. Manmatha in contrast, is a weakling, having only a bow of sugarcane, using soft flowers as his arrows. Besides he was burnt to ashes by Siva and was without a body. Still he won against the powerful Siva because he took the help of another bow,

the bow-like brow of Paravati. Paramasiva became enamoured of her and became her slave, and the slave of cupid, the god of love, acting according to his dictates. *Yasyam nityam... mahendrah* Indra the king of gods is said to be endowed with a thousand eyes. Though his court is graced by numerous fabulous beauties, his eyes do not look at them but are all concentrated all the time on Sati alone. He is so happy that he has a thousand eyes to drink in her beauty. Is this not a wonder?

Padme tasam Parinatirasau bhavalesaistvadanyaih - While expounding the invisibility of Rama, Hanuman declares in *Valmiki Ramayana* that neither Brahma nor Siva nor Indra can stand against him. These three, therefore, are considered the foremost of the gods. Desika says that the post that they hold and the positions that their spouses occupied in their affections are all due to a mere fraction of the will of Sri. Even as Lakshmi starts to will Sarasvati and others get their positions. This is indicated by *bhavalesaih*. Kuranatha in *Sristavah* mentions that while the world considers Sarasvati to be the goddess of learning, the cause of one being a scholar or a dud. The reality is that she herself is a vassal of Lakshmi.

In *Gita* (10-4) Lord Krishna states "Whatever being is possessed of lordly power or splendor or is energetic in noble endeavours, know that to spring from a fraction of My irresistible power." Again from in 10-34 He says that He Himself *Kirti, Sri, Vak* etc. However, *Srivisnupurana* (1-8-35) makes it clear that all male species are a manifestation of Visnu and their female counterparts a manifestation of Sri. Hence it is due to a fraction of the glory of Lakshmi that Sarasvati and others occupied their coveted positions of honour.

Sloka 13

*agre bhartuhsarasijamaye bhadrapitenisannam
ambhoraseradhigatasudha samplavad uttitam tvam
puspasara sthagita bhavanaih puskalavartakadyaih
kiptairambhaih kanakakalasairabhyasincan gajendrainh.*

As a result of the churning of the Milky ocean by Devas and Asuras, You, Laksmi devi emerged, seated on a lotus, prior to the appearance of nectar. Clouds like *Puskala* and *Avarta* rained flowers, screening the worlds. Taking a cue from them, mighty elephants performed Your coronation, ablution with water, from golden vessels in the presence of Your Lord.

This *Sloka* describing the coronation of Sri is the central pendant in the necklace of *Sristutih*

agre bhartuh ... nisannam - In the coronation of Rama, Sita was seated along with him. *sahasitam nyavesayat* says Valmiki. The use of *saha*, along with, may appear to give her a secondary place, a position of lesser importance. But here Her coronation takes place all by Herself in the presence of Her Lord, who is not destined to have a similar *pattabhiseka* at any time all alone. Apart from meaning "in front of" *agre* also conveys the sense of "earlier time". All His coronations flowered from and followed Hers which was celebrated earlier. As she provides the distinguishing mark of Her beloved, she is more important than Him, and her permanence is underlined by the word *bhartuh*

In the Rama *pattabhiseka*, Sita was seated along with Rama on a *ratnamaya peeta* a seat inlaid with precious gems. Considering that a seat befitting Her extreme delicacy and softness was necessary, the Devas placed Her here on a lotus. *Bhadrapita* also means *simhasana* or throne. So it also served as Her throne. Visnu had the privilege of witnessing the coronation of His Consort and enjoying it. The witness of Her Coronation as the empress of the worlds was no less a person than the Lord of the Universe himself.

Bhadra pitha also connotes *Mangala asana* or auspicious seat. She herself is the mangala devata. For the good of the world, the mangala devata appeared on a mangalpita with gracious looks showering auspiciousness on all, gods and humans besides Her own Lord.

It is said that the Coronation took place as soon as she appeared. That implies that it was Her natural right. That it took place in the presence of Her Lord suggests that the *samrajya* or empire really belonged to Her, and that it is because of Her that

Her Lord also acquired a right to it. This is clear from the fact that the devas could not regain their lost kingdom and influence till she appeared in the Milky Ocean, they had to get them only from Her.

ambhorasah - Nectar is sweet. But Laksmi is sweeter. She is considered the essence of nectar. (*Periya Tirumoli* 6-1-2) Visnu, who is described as nectar with four shoulders, *naltolamudu*, stood wondering at Her like other gods. She sprang out from the normal Milky Ocean, but when the nectar was sprouting from it.

The greatness of Rama and Krisna avatars is mentioned in *Ramayana*, *Bhagavatam* etc. *Srivisnu Purana* likewise describes the incarnation of *Mahalaksmi* in the Milky Ocean.

Sage Durvasa once met a vidyadara lady who was returning with the garland of Mahalaksmi after worshipping her. He begged and obtained that garland from her. Being extremely happy, he was hopping from place to place like a mad man in his delight. He then came upon Indra proceeding majestically on his ivory -white elephant Airavata possessed of four tusks, in all pomp and glory. Thinking that that Indra, being the chief of the gods, deserved that grand garland of Sri, the sage offered it to him. Indra carelessly and arrogantly took it with the goad and placed it on the head of the elephant, not showing it the respect that it deserved. The elephant ceased it with its trunk, flung it on the ground and trampled upon it. Enraged at this sacrilege, Durvasa cursed Indra to loose all his wealth and affluence. For the wrong committed by Indra, the thousand eyed, all the devas, thousands of them had to pay the price. The devas were defeated by the asuras and they went to pray to Lord Visnu, with Brahma at their head, for the restoration of their lost positions and kingdom. Visnu advised them to befriend the demons and churn the Milky Ocean with Mount Mandara as the churning rod and the great serpent Vasuki as the rope. He himself took the major part in the process, helping them in many ways, and that is how the *ksirabdi* came to be churned yielding back the elephant *airavata*, the white horse *ucalavras*, the moon, the *parijata* tree, the gem *Kaustubha* and other valuable objects, but the most precious of them all was unquestionably Mahalaksmi Herself.

(to be continued)

(continued from page 8)

of their being animate or inanimate. Patron and priest were oppressed by the heinousness of taking life. Believing that the tree suffers pain from the axe that cuts it down, they were sensitive to the taking of the 'life' of plants. In the ritual of the felling of a tree, for fashioning a sacrificial post from, a blade of grass, placed just where the axe was to fall, was bidden to protect the tree, from the pain of cutting; the axe was commanded not to cause harm to the tree. This could be no hypocritical play acting over the dismembering of the tree and its brethren are no accusers whose reproaches sacrifice (another sacrifice in fire) with divesting himself of every vestige of property.

Less severe was the impact of the discipline of the *Vaisya*, who, with his wealth of land of cattle and of trade had for daily duty, the obligations of unstinted charity, and for periodical duties, the obligation of performing sacrifices in fire which kept depleting him of accumulations of wealth. These three -- the twice born disciplined thus in desirelessness, to the accompaniment of symbolic rituals were enabled to enter on and persist in the discipline through the exertions of the once born *sudras* who laboured for the production of consumers goods and in rendering of personal services. - a course of life which meant that the once born had to sacrifice themselves so that the twice born may immediately takeover the fruits in sacrifice, virtually in fire and in charity to the destitute. The vendor of Soma was subjected to great contumely for preferring to make a fortune by the sale of the Soma to offering it in sacrifice.

The prime principle of life of the Vedic people, in all their four orders, turns out thus to be ruthless extinguishment of desires, made practicable by a complete sacrifice of all possessions.

The severe discouragement of desires in general, and of acquisition and of retention of property in particular, prevented society stratifying itself into classes marked off by gradations in wealth or into groups divided by varieties in desires. Man didn't stand divided from man by barriers to mutual goodwill and love. The better nature of man had full play and man found joy in giving himself to brother man in unstinted labour and love.

The most striking feature of the sacrifice of the twice born is that it was in fire. The objects were offered on fire so that they were completely consumed. The offering in fire in the most efficient mode of making the offering an irrevocable one: what is offered in *puja* might come back in part at least to the offerer. What is offered in fire does not survive : the flames render the offering ir retrievable.

Vedic culture had demanded, thus, of every one in every station of life, master or serf, that he shall keep himself free from attachments and from desire, leading a life in which he shall have as little of property and possessions as is possible in a world of temptations to wants and desires. Every one had to keep on divesting himself everything in the nature of property as soon as it threatened to accumulate in his hands. The divestiture would not be final if the things offered could come back to the sacrificer on the conclusion of the ritual as they would, at least in part, on the performance of *puja*. Nor would it be to the sacrificer's purpose if he offered the things up to a brother man: he could not saddle that other with property, the mainspring of desire, when he was divesting himself of ethical encumbrances for ethical deliverance. Only an offering in fire which wholly consumes what is thrown into it and leaves nothing behind for being salvaged is a true offering. The sacrifice in fire was, thus inevitable as a ritual to whoso was prepared, day after day, to live a life of renunciation, readily destroying his possessions so that they could not be temptations either to himself or to his neighbours.

This discipline of life it is that attested to by the Rg-Veda, the earliest document testifying to the earliest known way of life of the Hindus. The innumerable prayers in it are for long life, offspring, wealth and power. But, the long life is for protracted service to the gods, the progeny is for that service being continued through the endless ages, and the wealth and the power are for incitements to efforts to overcome the temptations of possessions. When the sacrificers prayed, "May *Dravinodas* give us riches that may be heard of" , they did not seek the riches for themselves; they declared, "We ask them for the gods." The sacrificers receive the riches and sacrifice them to the gods.

This cult of renunciation, formulated in the earliest days of Vedic culture when possessions were not spectacularly great, became the basis of complex sacrifices when material culture advanced and wealth increased. While only one or two goats formed the offering in the early days, great numbers of cattle of every description came to be offered in fire, in holocausts, with the increase in material possessions. Apparently, the temptations of economic prosperity loosened the grip of the cult of renunciation, and, gradually, disposed the common man to feel exasperated at what appeared to him the wanton destruction of the valuable products of a Nature which, in India, was not only kind but also bountiful. Apparently, too, the paradox of taking life in the spirit of Ahimsa, to which we shall refer presently, was not being understood. Reactions such as these must have been responsible for emphasis being shifted to another technique of renunciation. Sri Krishna, claiming to be the very Vedas, declared that there is little need for the sacrificial ritual and the slaying of animals if man lives a life in which he has no desire for the fruits of his acts. This is renunciation -- sacrifice -- in the spirit of Ahimsa and there is no taking of life and no destruction of property the sacrificer has to ward off. Not a little uneasy was the sacrificer in mind over the apparent perversity of circumstances which compelled him, for the high purpose of attaining ethical eminence, to descend to the taking of life: that he looks for salves for the wounds of a conscience badly bruised by the rub of duty against duty speaks to the genuineness of his tenderness of spirit.

Parallel to the idea that man's duty to make his sacrifice, all-inclusive does extend to the offering himself up in sacrifice was the notion that even beasts feel that they are under an obligation to give themselves up in an all-inclusive sacrifice and that, lacking the means of compassing that self-immolation, they are not loth to accept the opportunity given to them to be offered up in fire by the human sacrificer. Cows are said to offer their bodies to the gods.

The horse of the Asvamedha makes journey to the place of immolation with intent upon the gods, glad to be able to proceed to the presence of its father and mother in heaven. An address to the horse runs thus: "Let not your precious body (when being quartered) grieve you, for you are going verily (to the gods); let not the

axe linger in your body; let not the zealous but unskillful (Immola-
tor), missing the members, mangle your limbs needlessly. Verily, in
this death you do not die. Nor are you harmed, for by auspicious
roads you go to the gods."

The animal offering had no importance as such. The offerer's
aim was not the killing of life or the looking at the flow of blood, but
the denuding himself completely of property that could keep com-
ing back to him. His mind was dominated as much by the principle
of Ahimsa as by that of the all-embracing renunciation. That the
conflict in his mind resolved itself ultimately in a regretful prefer-
ence for the inflicting of pain for the achieving of the all inclusive
renunciation, cannot sustain an imputation against him that he was
averse to Ahimsa.

Ahimsa has, thus, to be accepted as an important factor in
the Indian culture of even so early an age as that of Rg-Veda. The
history of the doctrine, and of the attempt of the Rg-Vedic people
and the inheritors of their culture to live by that doctrine, may not be
traced here for lack of space. It has a history in which place will be
found for Atharvan, the Yadus, Kapila, Ghora Angirasa and Sri
Krishna.

Capitalism and Marxism, the 'isms now contending for domi-
nion, are foredoomed to failure as panacea for the ills of human
society. Both of them are designed to satisfy, and even pamper,
man's desires, though each desire breeds further desires, each of
which, in turn, breeds yet more desires. Few also are the desires
of one man that could be satisfied without cutting into the range of
another man's desires. Such being the case, when even the legiti-
macy of the desires cannot be put into issue, the gravity of the
disasters to society following on a sufferance of illegitimate desires
need hardly be expatiated on. To neutralize the conflict of the de-
sires of individuals has been the aim of religions. Buddhism, for
instance, called for a withdrawal from the world. Christianity pre-
scribed brotherhood and love. Islam emphasized charity. Society
has made no progress : it stands rooted its passions, evils and
crimes. Does the real panacea lie in a reversion to the ideals and
to the technique favoured in the *Rg-Veda* and adapted by Sri
Krishna?

A NOTE ON RITUALS AND SRIVAISNAVA WAY OF LIFE

By Dr. J. Parthasarathy

Misconceived state of interventions and the compulsions of bread-winning for individuals have made the practice of the *srivaishnava* way of life difficult and we know that much of it has been lost on today's conditions. This way of life is enshrined in time-honored custom and usage, *sistacara*; it is the result of a specific vaishnava vision, arising as a refinement on the framework of values enshrined in the *Vedas*, amplified by *Itihasa-puranas* and embodied in Injunctions of *Dharma-sastras*. It defies descriptions. One should be exposed to the example of venerated practitioners of the faith and also engage in dutiful studies of their works so that these together may put us on the road to an understanding of this vision set against its background.

Freedom from the constraints of earthly existence, *moksha*, is the ultimate good in our scheme of things. The realization of such freedom or near freedom in this life and the life after, would demand discipline and practice of a special kind. These are suggested and elaborated by *sruti* and *smriti* as daily and seasonal regimen (*nitya naimittika anusthana*) and rituals (*samskaras*) marking particular stages of an individuals life. The spiritual needs of the community as a whole is taken care of in temple rituals and observances which though suggested in the *vedas*, are elaborated in the *Agamas*. These latter works prescribe the details of temple construction, consecration and worship; It has been suggested by research workers that *yajana* (which is the essential element of *homa*, fire-oblations) the prevailing rituals of Vedic sacrifices, gets substituted by icon worship (*Upasana*) and *arcana*) conceived in the same spirit in the *Agamas*. The latter has also been made as rigorous as the former with the chanting of vedic mantras added thereto.

As vedic culture blossoms out into the multicolored and many-splendoured efflorescence of modern Hinduism, many ramifications in ritual and practice emerge in new religious formulations of sects, providing endless material for our study. It is also noteworthy that the pursuit of formal conformity in observances and ritu-

als has in a cyclic movement throughout our history, provoked liberalizations emphasizing inner attitudes and transformations of personality, as opposed to hidebound obedience to rules. My revered teacher, the late R.S. Desikan highlighted this fundamental duality besetting spiritual life in a novelette in the early thirties entitled 'The Sunrise or His Coming'. Herein he showed the awakening of a rule bound orthodox scholar to the glory of inner mystical love of man, and God breaking out in violation of irksome practices conscientiously followed. Liberalizations of rituals have also resulted in rebounds towards older rule-bound positions of ceremonialism.

In the history of *Srivaishnavism* we see Vedic ritual reaching us through its Agamic adoptions further leavened with the inspired *Tamil* utterances of the *Azhvars*. There is also an exaltation of devotional surrender as a supreme end, regardless of all ceremony or hierarchal distinctions, along with a rebound in favour of a more regulated approach. This is a broad generalization of the trends which led to the post-Ramanuja schism of the southern and northern schools in Indian *vaisnavism*.

There are two very different ways of looking at our rituals: One, the standpoint developed by modern disciplines like comparative religion, sociology or history, usually adopted by outsiders to Hinduism and in particular *vaisnavism* of which we are speaking here. Two, the stand point of a member of the community, an heir to a rich heritage, trying to reflect, with a native involvement on the vicissitudes that this heritage has undergone and its modern situation in an unfavorable world.

These two attitudes may be used by the same person but they will naturally differ in sympathy of vision tools of analysis and conclusions. There is always a need for members of the *Srivaishnava* community to bring to attention our observances and rituals; these require to be better known and distinguished in their closed details by our interested public. The word ritual needs to be defined clearly in discussions on the subject as one finds that mantric rituals and socio-religious observations (properly classified under festivals) are lumped together.

THIRUPPAVAI AND THE UPANISADS

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ISVARA OR GOD

It is generally believed that an accurate conception of God is beyond the reach of the human intellect. With the sceptic, such a conception is impossible, as God is not cognizable by any of the ordinary senses -- external or internal. With the devout religionist, on the other hand, such an idea is not only realized, but also avowed to be as clear as daylight. Granting, for the sake of argument, that such a conception is possible and realizable, how is this conception formed? This consists of the idea of the "model man, the highest being of the animal kingdom endowed with spirit," together with *something extra* which distinguishes "God" from "Man." This additional "something" must be altogether transcendental from the very nature of things; and is realized, only partially, by those favoured few "whom the Lord chooseth out of His special Grace." The Prophets, messiahs, and saints who were so specially favoured with the gift of a *Divine eye* to take a survey of the Lord's *divine appearance*, have been so far gracious and noble minded as to take pity on their less favoured mortals, and to communicate to them their impressions of the supreme Lord. That the bestowal of the gift of "*Such a divine eye*" upon the highly spiritual beings and saints is an act of *Divine Grace*, is clear from the following extract from the *Katha Upanishad*--

"He whom the Self (Supreme Lord) chooseth, by him He can be gained; He condescends to manifest his *divine appearance* to such a devotee." *Katha* 1.2.23

The fact that the Lord *did present* Himself in certain *forms* to the minds of several favoured Saints, Prophets and Messiahs who longed with earnest prayers to see Him, is based on clear and accurate testimony handed down to posterity as "*Revelations*" in their sacred writings in different lands at different times in the history of mankind. These *forms*, in which the lord showed

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Himself, cannot but be more or less *human* in shape, 'as they had to be *realized* by *human beings*, though endowed with superior wisdom. But it should not be supposed however, that the *Forms* in which He was seen, were ever subject to the influence of *Karma* like those of ordinary mortals. These Forms are supernatural. The Upanishads confirm the same view by their unequivocal declaration that the Almighty Lord is a *Purusha* (man), and is seen as such in heaven, in the sun, and in the eye.

(1) "In the beginning, there was only the Supreme Being, in the shape of man." *Brihad.* I.4, 1.

(2) "He, Lord Narayana, has the shape of man." *Taittiriya* II.2., 5

(3) "He, that is seen in the sun with golden appearance as man." *Chandogya.* I.6.6.

(4) "He (Narayana) that is seen in the eye in *the human form*" *Chandogya* I.6.6.

In support of this view, Sri Bhagavan Ramanujacharya in his Commentary upon Vedanta Sutra -- (*Antastad-dharmopadesat* (I.I.21) observes in his lucid style, quoting chapter and verse, --

"The All-merciful Lord, out of His own Goodness and Grace, manifests His *natural divine appearance*, in answer to the prayers of His devotees, in such forms as are suitable to the circumstances, and in harmony with the convictions and aspirations of His votaries either as a deva (daimgod), or a man, or such like objects."

Again, in another passage-- "The Supreme Being, in order that He may be easily approached and worshipped by all (from the devas downwards) incarnates, out of His own Free will, upon earth, in diverse ways, adjusting Himself to all conditions in several grades of existence with reference to shape, dress, mode of life, and other characteristics, without giving up, at the same time, His own ultra-mundane and perfect character."

Hence this Purusha, (the Supreme Being seated as the Inner soul of all creatures) if conceived at all by the human intellect of limited powers, should be conceived as perfect in every respect-- perfect physically, intellectually, morally and spiritually, in whatever forms Deva or man) He may have shown Himself.

Our position will still be found unassailable, if we should go even a step further in trying to show that from the moral attributes of the individual soul as seen at present in his embodied human condition, a reasonable inference can be made with reference to the attributes of the Almighty Lord.

This statement may be logically substantiated, if we look at the question from another standpoint in conformity with the declarations of the Upanisads. In dealing with this question, the following two axiomatic principles require to be remembered and applied.

1. The qualities (*Dharma*) perceptible in the effect must be seen as intensely or more intensely, in the cause, but not less in the cause. 2. The qualities (*Dharma*) perceptible in the part must be seen in a much higher degree in the whole, and cannot be less in the whole.

If these two universal propositions are not denied, then we shall be in a position to draw certain important conclusions regarding the relationship between the supreme Being and the individual soul. The Upanisads declare--

"He (Narayana) *willed*. may I be many, may I grow forth." Taittiriya II.6.2.

"All that exists (Universe consisting *chit* and *achit*) has Paramatman as its soul." (Chandogya VI.8.7)

Hence the Supreme Lord is the cause, and the Universe that effect.

This very fact is enunciate in vedanta Sutra. II. 1. 15. by Sri Bhagavan Badarayana thus:

Tadananyatvam arambhanasabdadbhyah - "The non-difference or identity of them (of cause and effect results from such terms as "origin" and the like."

Again, the *Vedas* declare: His (Narayana) *one foot* constitutes this *whole Universe*. *Chandogya* III.12,6

Hence it follows that the Supreme Lord is the whole, and the Universe is His Part. This doctrine was duly propounded by the same immortal author of the *Vedanta Sutras* in *Amsa nana vyapadesadanyathacapidasakitavaditvamadhiyata eke* II.3.42

Since the Supreme Lord is the *cause*, and the Universe the effect, it follows, from the first principle enunciated above, that the *characteristics* or *qualities* found in the *Universe* (Individual soul) must be seen as *more intensely* in the *causa* (Supreme Lord). Applying the second principle to this question, it is patent that the *characteristics* of the Supreme Lord should be *more intense* than those of the individual soul, as the latter constitutes only a *part* of the **Former**. Hence all the moral qualities-- such as Wisdom, Power, Strength, Sovereignty, Courage and Happiness, Grace, Patience, etc. which are seen in a very limited degree in the *finite* individual soul (Effect), are found in the *Infinite Supreme Lord* (Cause) in their *highest degree and perfection*. So far, the inferences are perfectly logical and the same truths have been in several places corroborated in the *Upanisads*.

Hence He is declared in the *Srutis* as Omniscient, Omnipotent, All-powerful, Lord Paramount, Perfectly Happy, all-merciful, Evergraceful and so on..... to *Infinity*. It may not be out of place here to quote the view of Dr. Otto Pfleiderer, the eminent philosopher and professor of Theology, University of Berlin, on the same subject. "The

self conscious and self determining life of man (individual soul) is unquestionably " says he, "the highest form of life that we know at all. Now if it be admitted that in the case of man, it is confined to the limit of *finitude*, and cannot in this human *finite form* find place in God, yet it does not follow from this that we must deny to God the *highest* that we know from our experience. As there cannot lie less in the *cause* than in the *effect*, nor *less* in the whole than in the *part*, the *infinite principle* of the world which produces the human spirit along with the else and embraces them in itself, cannot possess the spiritual energy of life in less measure, but rather in a much more *perfect* degree than man." Hence he adds - 'The spiritual being of man has a *certain, though still weak participation* in that *infiniteness and unconditionedness* which is *original and perfect* only in God.'

While in the moral order of the world as observed in man, the good side of this spiritual nature was thus made the basis for making a logical inference regarding the Attributes of God found in Him in their original perfection, why it may be argued with equal cogency, was it that a similar inference with respect to God, is not drawn regarding the other (evil) side of his nature i.e. his Imperfections and infirmities- such as finiteness, hunger and thirst, grief, anger, old age, birth and death and helplessness, etc., which are noticed as part and parcel of human nature? Surely, there would have been no hesitation whatsoever on our part to make a similar inference, and apply the principle to their logical consequences if this evil side did really form part and parcel of his true nature. But it does not. This evil side which apparently attaches itself to the soul, and which, on closer reflection is found to be an exerscence, is due to the influence of the inexorable Karma to whose laws the individual soul had to subject himself, when he came in contact with prakriti. Besides it stands to reason to say that a Being who is perfect in every respect cannot, on a *priori* grounds, be the repository of any-

thing repulsive, heinous, disagreeable or imperfect even in relation to the human understanding. Let us see what Vedas, the Upanishads, and other sacred writings declare on this point--

Two birds, inseparable friends, cling to the same tree. One of them eats the sweet fruit, the Other looks on without eating (as a spectator and witness)." *Rigveda*. I. 164, 20. Also *Mundaka*. III.1, 1, *Swetasvatara*, IV.6. and *Katha*. III.1.

Know thou (Arjuna) also that all emanations and qualities are born of Prakriti." In the production of cause and effect, Prakriti is said to be the cause; Purusha as seated in Prakriti, experiences the qualities born of Prakriti. Attachment to qualities is the same cause of his birth in good and evil wombs." *Bhagavadgita* XII.19-21

"With the help of these twelve superior attributes of the soul the intelligent being should renounce all false notions -- such as 1) 'I am no other than the body' and the like. 2) 'The body and the like is mine' -- which notions spring from delusions." *Bhagavata* VI. 7. 20.

Plumness, leanness, diseases, mental afflictions, hunger, thirst, fear, quarrel, desire, old age, sleep, attachment, anger, pride, egoism -- these conditions are affections of the body, and therefore refer to a person who has attachment thereto; but they cannot affect me (soul who is unborn and eternal.)" *Bhagavata* V.10.9.

Hence it is clear that any of the imperfections that constitute apparently the evil side of human nature, does not actually form part and parcel of the individual soul. While such is the case, where is there any ground for attributing any of these imperfections to the Almighty God who is perfect in every thing? And it is preposterous to raise an objection, when there is not even a shadow of

foundation for entertaining such a hypothesis. To caution against any such notion being ever entertained by the ignorant or the uninitiated the Upanishads declare most emphatically in more than one place that the Almighty Being is by nature-- *apahatapapma* etc. (vide No. 4 of *Isvara's characteristics*.)

With these preliminary observations, a few fundamental characteristics of *Isvara*- positive and negative - will be enumerated below --

1. Lord of the Noumenal World - While the Almighty pervades on the one hand this *phenomenal universe* (*Ekapadvibhuti* - One foot Empire, as it were) as the inner soul of all things - animate and inanimate, He on the other hand *controls* simultaneously the Noumenal Universe (*Triadvibhuti* - Three foot Empire, as it were) from His Central Seat in Divine Paradise with His Consorts -- Lakshmi, and Bhumi; shining resplendent in His natural glorious shape of infinite grace, delightful fragrance, matchless beauty and describable handsomeness; clad in gold apparel adorned with mighty weapons and graceful ornaments; and surrounded by myriads of immortal celestials, who minister to him in all manner of ways, and whose sole duty consists in chanting halleluiahs in praise of the Supreme Being, not to speak of the eternal bliss and enjoyment which they share with the Lord.

"All things of the Universe-- animate and inanimate are His one-foot portion in this mundane world, whereas His three-foot (major portion) shines immortal in Paradise" *Rigveda*. X.90,3, and *Chandogya* III.12,6.

The Supreme Lord, (Narayana) has His divine seat in the celestial city (*vaikuntha*)."

2. The Being of naturally effulgent, glorious, and graceful shape, not brought about by the Law of Karma

"Now that Golden Person, the Supreme Being,

Narayana, that is seen within the sun, has golden heard and golden hair, golden (effulgent) altogether to the very tips of His nails." *Chandogya* 1. 6, 6.

"O Pushan, narayana, gather Thy mild rays, as I desire to see, and adore Thy fairest Divine Form (which I may do by Thy Grace.) [*Isavasya*.16]

3. The Being of Infinite Glory.

"That Almighty Being is Pure, and is the Light of all lights, and the wise who are blessed with true knowledge understand Him as such. [*Mundaka* II.2.9.]

That transcendent Light, Paramatman, who shines resplendent above this mundane world, nay even above Noumenal world [*Chandogya* III. 13, 7.]

4. The great Fountain of Superior Infinite Knowledge and Bliss, and devoid of all evil

"Brahman (Narayana) who has infinite knowledge and bliss." [*Brlhad*. III. 9. 8]

He (Narayana) is one God, hidden in all objects, all pervading, the Inner soul within all beings, watching over all works, dwelling in all beings, the witness, the perceiver, the only one, devoid of all evil."

Svetasvatara. VI. 11

The word Nirguna in the above passage is interpreted as devoid of all evil, inasmuch as the Supreme Being is ever free from the influence of the eight conditions or qualities to which the Jivatma (human soul) is subject. These are here enumerated by way of contrast. *Chandogya*. VIII.1.5

This is the supreme soul 1) free from any touch or shadow of sin 2) free from old age, 3) free from old age, 4) free from all grief, 5) free from hunger 6) free from thirst 7) whose desire is infallible, 8) whose will or thought is infallible.

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